



**TESTIMONY on HJR 127 and HB 3094**  
**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF TEXAS**  
**House Redistricting Committee**

**April 20, 2021**

I am **Stephanie Swanson** testifying as a member and on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Texas **in support of HJR 127 and HB 3094**. We appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today. Thank you for allowing us to share the League of Women Voters of Texas position on these bills.

Because of recent technological advances, it is now possible for people to draw a district map that is so extremely and durably biased that it locks in political power for more than a decade. The extreme gerrymandering that we see today when one political party is in control of the redistricting process is a far cry from what our Founding Fathers had envisioned when they set out to write our Constitution. "The accumulation of all powers, legislative, executive, and judiciary, in the same hands, whether of one, a few, or many, and whether hereditary, self-appointed, or elective, may justly be pronounced the very definition of tyranny," wrote James Madison in the Federalist 47, 1788.

This sentiment is felt by members of both political parties here in Texas. Former Republican State Senator Jeff Wentworth was a longtime advocate for redistricting reform. Senator Wentworth was around to see Democrats heavily gerrymander against Republicans in the 70s, 80s, and 90s. He filed legislation for a bipartisan citizens redistricting commission starting in the 1990s, and he continued to fight for this reform even after Republicans gained control of the Legislature in 2003. He did manage to pass his legislation through the Senate on three separate occasions ('07, '09, '11), and he almost got it through the House in '09, which shows there was bipartisan support for reform not too long ago.

Furthermore, a recent public opinion poll conducted by the Hobby School of Public Affairs at the University of Houston showed that 70% of Texans support the creation of an Independent Redistricting Commission, with 42% strongly supporting it and 28% somewhat supporting it. Many Texans want politicians who will work for the common good, who are not driven by partisan pressure.

Therefore, the League is proud to support HJR 127 and its enabling legislation HB 3094, which would create a nonpartisan, independent citizens redistricting commission. This legislation would create a commission that would be truly independent of the Legislature, both in terms of membership and operation. Every step of the process, from the setup of the commission to its operation, has been safeguarded to ensure that the commission is fair, diverse, and transparent:

- After a lengthy selection process to remove applicants with conflicts of interest, the resulting commission would reflect the state's racial and ethnic diversity. A panel of State Auditors would be charged with the selection process, and the same list of conflicts of interest would also apply to their selection.
- The Commission would also be balanced by partisanship and would contain 5 Republicans, 5 Democrats, and 4 Independents.
- The commissioners would hold a series of public input hearings around the state to solicit input from the public. Commissioners would be required to use ranked, nonpartisan criteria to draw the district maps that would prioritize communities of interest.

- The commission would also be required to draw maps in front of the public, and there would be strict limits placed on commissioners to prevent them from speaking with legislators and lobbyists while the maps are being drawn. The commission would also be required to follow the Open Meetings Act.
- Another series of public input hearings would be required after the first map proposal is revealed.
- Census data, maps, meeting notices and other relevant information would be posted on a central website, so that the public could truly be a part of the process.
- The final proposed maps would also need a supermajority vote in order to take effect, and a final report would be issued that explains the commission's work.

The League believes that the formation of such a commission would promote fair and effective representation. We also believe that voters should choose their representatives, not the other way around.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

**For additional information, please contact: Stephanie Swanson, Redistricting Issue Chair,  
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The League of Women Voters is one of America's oldest and most trusted civic nonprofit organizations. Formed in 1919, the League of Women Voters of Texas represents over 13,000 grassroots advocates and 34 local Leagues across the State of Texas.

The League of Women Voters never supports or opposes candidates for office or political parties. We encourage the informed and active participation of citizens in government and seek to influence public policy through education and advocacy. Membership in the League is open to people 16 and older of all gender identities.